

SPREAD LIGHT 358



Parsha

Candle Lighting (Toronto)

Shabbos Ends

Va'era

4:49 PM

5:56 PM

ISSUE #8 | JANUARY 17, 2026 | כ"ה טבת תשפ"ו

Reflective
Question:

Where in your life do you ask who am I, and what would change if you showed up as a messenger?

Gematria on the Parshah:
The Paroh Within

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshah Vaeira, Hashem sends Moshe and Aharon to confront Paroh. The Baal Shem Tov teaches that the greatest Paroh is not just a historical figure, but lives within us. What is the Paroh within that keeps us in exile? And what is the Moshe inside each of us, waiting to lead us to redemption?

Paroh Rules the Mind

The Baal Shem Tov says the true Galut Mizrayim is being imprisoned by the yetzer hara. The gematria of פרעה (Pharaoh) is 355, the same as מחשבה (thought). The greatest Paroh is the one who rules our mind, the thoughts that keep us down, and hold us back from fulfilling Hashem's will.

In 1927, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn was arrested by the Soviets for risking his life to promote Torah and mitzvot. As he was sent on a train into exile, he stood before his chassidim and explained that while a Jew's body could be confined or exiled, no power could take away his spirit or commitment to Torah. The lesson is clear: the Soviets could control the body, but they could never enslave the mind unless a person allowed it.

How can we be freed from Pharaoh's mental prison? The gematria of חכמה + בינה + דעת (wisdom + understanding + knowledge) is 614, the same as חרות (freedom). The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that the role of Moshe, the Tzaddik of the generation, is to draw Daat, to open the eyes of the nation to see Hashem's perspective. Through Moshe Rabbeinu's Torah, we achieve true freedom by glimpsing at Hashem's love for ourselves and every Jew. The Hornsteipler Rebbe advises beginning the day with the Torah of a Tzaddik, so that our eyes are freshly opened daily to Hashem's perspective.

Paroh Puts Us to Sleep

Even when we learn the Torah of the Tzaddik we can still fall into a deep spiritual slumber. Rebbe Nachman explains that a person can sleep their entire life without realizing it. The gematria of שנה (sleep) is 355, the same as פרעה. Like Paroh, the yetzer hara keeps us asleep and makes us forget the galut we are in.

The Chiddushei HaRim teaches that until Moshe arrived, Bnei Yisrael was so immersed in the galut

of the yetzer hara, that they did not even feel it. Once they became aware of their galut, the path to redemption began. Awareness is the beginning of freedom.

The Baal Shem Tov emphasizes that we must pray daily for Hashem to take us out of our personal Mizrayim. It is not enough to pray for general redemption. We must ask for help with our own struggles. The Ruzhiner Rebbe adds that only when we pray with the awareness that Hashem alone can free us, will redemption come.

Paroh Traps Us in Desire

Rav Moshe MiKobrin says the darkest Paroh is when we have simchah in the desires of the yetzer hara. פרעה (Pharaoh) 355 is the gematria בשמחה (with joy). The joy of the yetzer hara pretends to free us but entraps us. How can we overcome this Paroh? With simchah of kedushah, true joy in mitzvot.

The gematria of יציאת מצרים (Exodus from Egypt) is 891, the same as מצות בשמחה (mitzvot with joy). The Slonimer Rebbe teaches that as long as Yosef lived, Paroh could not enslave the Jews. This is because Yosef, the Tzaddik, represents pleasure in mitzvot, and his joy extinguishes the fire of the yetzer hara. Likewise, to combat Paroh, we must serve Hashem with simchah in every mitzvah.

Chacham Ben Zion Abba Shaul adds that we don't realize the greatness of Torah and mitzvot enough. He says every time we study Torah or perform a mitzvah, we must remember and rejoice that we are bringing blessing to the entire world.

The Chiddushei HaRim further explains how to serve Hashem with joy. He quotes a Midrash: when Aharon heard from Hashem that Moshe had become leader, he rejoiced in his heart. The Midrash says that if Aharon had known Hashem would write about his joy, he would have gone out to greet Moshe with drums and lyre. This does not mean Aharon sought praise. Rather, if he truly understood how much his joy mattered to Hashem, his joy would have known no limits.

When we perform mitzvot, we need to pause and be fully aware of what we are doing. Even a small verbal acknowledgment, such as saying quietly, "This mitzvah is bringing blessing to the world and joy to Hashem," can open our hearts. By pausing a few times and verbalizing this we strengthen our connection to the Moshe within and free ourselves from the inner Paroh.

You Are Not the Whole
Story You Are the Messenger

By: Adam Klasner



Moshe stands at the burning bush and answers God with hineni, here I am. It sounds like total readiness. And yet almost immediately, he pushes back. He resists the mission. He argues. He doubts himself. This is not weakness. It is honesty. Moshe is not confused about who he is. He is asking a much deeper question.

You told Yaakov, I will go down with you into Egypt and I will bring you up. If You are the One redeeming them, then why are You sending me?

God answers with a line that quietly reframes everything. I will be with you. Not instead of you. Through you. You are not the redeemer. You are the messenger. You are the channel through which redemption enters the world.

This is why the Torah places such weight on the idea of shlichus, agency. When an agent acts fully on behalf of the sender, it is as if the sender acted. Spiritually, this is the map of inner freedom. The deepest exile is not only external. It is the feeling of being trapped inside your reactions, your fear, your coping mechanisms. Mizrayim means narrowness. A life lived in contraction. And when the nervous system is in survival mode, it cannot hear big visions. It can only focus on the next breath.

That is why the Torah says the Jewish people could not listen to Moshe because of shortness of breath and harsh labor. Freedom felt threatening. Redemption sounded unrealistic. They were not evil or stubborn. They were overwhelmed.

Moshe could lead because he was empty in the right way. Not erased. Not numb. But transparent. He did not need to own the outcome or protect an image of himself. He was a vessel. A mirror. And that is why his name barely appears in the Haggadah. Because the story is not about him. It is about what moves through him.

This becomes deeply personal when you stop seeing your life as something you must control and start sensing it as something you are meant to carry. When you relate to yourself as the whole story, everything feels heavy. Every failure defines you. Every fear feels dangerous. But when you relate to yourself as a messenger, the weight shifts. You still feel fear. You still have doubts. But you are no longer alone inside them.

You begin asking a different question. Not, am I



For inquiries or sponsorship, please reach out to spreadlight358@gmail.com

Designed & printed by innovarastudios.com

enough? But, what am I being asked to show up for right now?

That question is the beginning of emotional and spiritual liberation.

A Little Comfort, A lot of Damage

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



In Parshas VaEira, we witness seven of the ten plagues that struck Egypt. Each plague reveals another dimension of Pharaoh's refusal to submit to Hashem's will. Among them, the plague of frogs stands out – not only for its intensity, but for what happens after it ends.

When Moshe Davened for the plague to cease, the frogs did not simply vanish. Instead, they died wherever they had invaded – inside homes, in courtyards, and throughout the fields. The Egyptians gathered the remains into large heaps, and the land was left with a terrible stench. Yet the Torah tells us **"וַיֵּרָא פֶּרֶעַה כִּי הִיטָהוּ ה' הַיּוֹחָה"** (Shemos 8:11), Pharaoh had a sense of relief. Seeing that the immediate pressure had eased, he once again hardened his heart and refused to listen (Shemos 8:8-11).

This reaction is difficult to understand. Unlike other plagues whose effects disappeared completely once they ended, the consequences of the frogs lingered in a very tangible way. Why, then, does the Torah emphasize that Pharaoh felt relieved?

The Malbim explains that Pharaoh assumed that Moshe's promise to remove the frogs meant they would leave entirely, as occurred with other plagues. Moshe, however, intended that they would die in place, leaving Egypt to deal with the consequences. When Pharaoh saw that the situation improved but was not fully resolved, he concluded – incorrectly – that Moshe had failed to keep his word. This misunderstanding gave Pharaoh the excuse he needed to harden his heart further (Malbim on Shemos 8:10). The Sforno suggests an alternative explanation, that Pharaoh's sense of relief was a relative one. Although the land still reeked from the dead frogs, the immediate suffering had subsided. Additionally, the source of the plague – the river – still contained living frogs, meaning the potential for future harm remained. Nevertheless, even this reduction in discomfort was enough for Pharaoh to convince himself that the crisis had been averted (Sforno, Shemos 8:11).

Pharaoh's response highlights a deeply human flaw. When pain diminishes – even slightly – we are often tempted to declare victory, assuming no further change is necessary. Temporary comfort can dull our sense of urgency and leave underlying problems unaddressed.

The plague of frogs teaches us a critical lesson: minimal relief is not the same as genuine resolution. True growth requires confronting the full challenge, not settling for fleeting comfort.

May we learn to recognize moments of easing not as permission to stop, but as opportunities to finish the work Hashem has given us to accomplish.



Exile and Redemption

By: Rabbi Adam Law



The beginning of the book of Exodus are the parshas Shmos and Vaere. Shmos describes the bitter exile of the Children of Israel, reduced to slavery in Egypt, having coming down there as princes. Shmos means names. It is a memorial for the fate of those who went down to exile in Egypt.

Vaere, however, is the start of redemption, which starts with the makos being inflicted upon our oppressors. G-d shows his strong hand redeeming His people and Moshe leads us out of Egypt. We receive the Torah and enter the land of Israel.

These parshas show the pattern of exile and redemption (גלות וגאולה) on a national level which is repeated throughout our history. This had been foreshadowed in the exiles of the Patriarchs and even Adam. But even deeper, these opposites are rooted in the fabric of creation itself, related to the mystery of the infinite G-d creating a finite world.

G-d created the world to have a relationship with us. A relationship only has value when we have choice. So the obstacle for that good must be substantial. This is the void and emptiness described at the beginning of the Torah. G-d, so to speak, contracted His infinite light, creating the possibility for it to seem as if He is not there.

While in the Pesach story exile and redemption is national, it is also a personal concept. Simply, to be in exile is to be not connected to G-d. We really have one task – to see G-d in everything. This is as it says in the gemara: **הַכֹּל בִּיְדֵי שָׁמַיִם חוּץ מִיִּרְאַת שָׁמַיִם**, everything is in the hands of heaven except for fear of heaven (Berachos 33b).

When a person realizes that God is One, involved in all the situations of the world, the darkness of this exile is overcome with light. It is like searching all the crevices of his house for chametz by the light of a candle.

Because redemption is rooted in the universal, when one heals, he also fixes the very fabric of reality, bringing the universe to a state of tikun. As it says in the gemara, a person should always see everything hanging on him to see which way the world will go (Kiddushin 40b). Through his personal redemption he redeems everything.

The tikun of exile is the mitzvah of Unifying G-d.

When Redemption Begins in Pressure

Hashem tells Moshe:

"ה' יִמְשׁוּ יָדָשׁ לִאֲבֹב בְּקֶעֱי לֹאֵן קִחְצִי לֹא סֶהֱרַבָּא לֹא אֲרָאֵן. סֶהֱל יִתְעַדּוּן אֵל."

"I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as Kel Shakkai, but by My Name Hashem I was not known to them." (Shemot 6:3)

Rashi explains:

"תִּתִּימָא תְדִימָב סֶהֱל יִתְרַכִּינֵי אֵל – סֶהֱל יִתְעַדּוּן אֵל. רַכְשׁ לִשְׁלֹא וְנִמְאֵן ה' יִמְשׁ אֲרֵקֵן הִילְעֵשׁ."

"I was not known to them in My attribute of truth, by which My Name Hashem is called – faithful to fulfill His promise." (Rashi to Shemot 6:3)

The Avot lived in a world of promises. Moshe stands at the moment when those promises are about to be fulfilled.

Yet everything seems to be getting worse. Moshe cries out:

"וַיֵּמָאֵן בְּאֵתִי אֵל פֶּרֶעַה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הָרַע לְעַם הָזֶה"
"Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, things have only gotten worse for this people." (Shemot 5:23)

The Zera Shimshon explains that this pattern – where suffering increases just before redemption – is not a contradiction but part of the very structure of geulah. Before freedom emerges, the old system must tighten and begin to break.

The Ramchal, in Derech Hashem, teaches that Hashem allows opposition and obstruction to intensify just before a higher good is revealed, so that the world will be properly prepared to receive it. The Zohar expresses this as a spiritual law:

"לֵית נְהוּרָא אֵלָא מִנּוּ חֲשׁוּכָא."
"There is no light except that which comes from darkness." (Zohar I, 4a; also Zohar III)

Light that does not come through darkness does not endure.

The Arizal teaches that revelation depends on the capacity of the vessel to receive it. In Etz Chaim he writes:

"וְהָאוֹר אֵינוֹ נִתְפָּשֵׁט אֵלָא כְּפִי שִׁיעוּר הַכֵּלִי."
"The light is only drawn forth according to the measure of the vessel." (Etz Chaim, Heichal Adam Kadmon)

When Hashem wants to bring greater **אוֹר** into the world, the **כֵּלִי** must first expand. That expansion feels like pressure, even like breaking – but it is really the soul and the nation becoming *able to hold a higher level of Divine light*.

This is why Hashem tells Moshe:

"עַתָּה תֵּרָאֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לְפָרֶעַח."
"Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh." (Shemot 6:1)

Not later.
Now – at the moment of greatest pressure.

As individuals and as a people, we must realize that darkness is not the end – it is the moment when the vessel is being stretched to hold a greater light.

May Hashem give us the emunah to remain strong when things feel constricted, and may we merit to see the full geulah of Klal Yisrael speedily in our days, when all concealment gives way to the **אוֹר** of Hashem's presence.

Canadian Standard
PLUMBING
It's the Canadian Way!
416-209-4773



Designed & printed by innovarastudios.com

For inquiries or sponsorship, please reach out to spreadlight358@gmail.com

WANDERINGS
WITH ADAM LAW
Psychotherapy and Coaching
Adamnichlaw@gmail.com
Adamlawpsychotherapy.com